

Mississauga reconsiders its public spaces

By Blake Eligh

Ed Sajecki's window looks out over a lot of wasted potential. From his corner office in **Mississauga's** city hall tower, the planning and building commissioner has a southwest view of the city, and although that view spreads out to the horizon, Sajecki is more interested with what is going on directly below. Or more to the point, what is not going on—it is lunchtime on a sunny June day, so the square in front of city hall should be thronging with picnicking staffers and shoppers from Square One. The landscaped courtyard of the adjacent library should be full of people too, but with the exception of a few folks making a beeline for the city hall front doors, there is hardly anyone around.

“Look at that,” Sajecki says, pointing to the empty spaces. “Where are all the people?”

It is a good question—the city centre has experienced exponential growth over the past decade, with dozens of residential and office towers springing up around city hall—within 10 years, the area population is projected to swell to 50,000-residents. Located adjacent to an arts centre, movie complex and the country's second-largest shopping mall, the place should be overrun with people. Instead, it looks like a ghost-town.

That is a mystery that Mississauga staffers are hoping to solve with the help of New York-based place-making consultant **Project for Public Spaces**.

Public Spaces was hired last year by the city to create a program to revitalize public spaces around the city, with a special focus on new parks and open spaces in the city centre. The project, which has an upset limit of \$90,000, is funded equally by the city and area developers **AMACON Development Inc** and **The Daniels Corporation**.

According to Public Spaces vice president **Ethan Kent**, Mississauga has made tremendous investment in its infrastructure, but has not paid enough attention to who uses that infrastructure and how. He says that poor pedestrian links between destinations like the library and the Living Arts Centre are among the problems contributing to the lack vibrancy and identity in the area.

Community services planning director **Bruce Carr** agrees.

“The buildings are architectural icons, but the spaces are not being used,” Carr told *NRU*. “If we want people to move in, and we do not provide them with something to do or someplace to go, we

are going to end up with crime and other problems.”

Earlier this summer, 200-city staffers were hauled out of their respective silos to ponder the conundrum of the city's empty spaces. During this past week, work continued as staff and consultants hosted public and stakeholder workshops to come up with ideas to make Mississauga's city centre more vibrant and attractive to residents and visitors.

The brainstorming sessions have brought lots of suggestions. Among them are recommendations to close or redesign portions of City Centre and Princess drives to create more pedestrian-friendly environments, as well as a recommendation move the Square One

farmers' market from its current location in the outer parking lot to a site closer to city hall. Another option would see Burnhamthorpe Road transformed from a through-way into a grand boulevard.

According to Kent, the secret to a great city lies in “the

power of 10”—10 major destinations, each with at least 10 great activities. Kent said that animating a public place could be as simple as adding outdoor reading benches to the square next to the library, or as complicated as connecting the city's park system. The project is currently focussed on the city centre as one

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The report has also launched fresh questions about the appropriateness and rigor of York Region's ongoing environmental assessment of the extension, a proposed four-lane highway that would pave over the salamander's habitat.

York Region is seeking approval of the four-lane highway from provincial environment minister **Laurel Broten**. Environmentalists have asked the minister to reject the terms of reference of the environmental assessment by "pointing out the futility of spending millions of taxpayers' dollars on studies to justify the destruction of a key piece of

"The discovery of evidence of the Jefferson Salamander should effectively put Boyd Park off-limits to York Region and its destructive highway once and for all."

- David Donnelly

the greenbelt."

The TRCA report found 43-rare species of plants, 25-significant breeding bird species, six-amphibian species of concern and one nationally threatened fish species in Boyd Park. •

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destination; future initiatives will look to improving public spaces in other city destinations, such as Port Credit, or creating a continuous park link along the Credit River which, Kent says, could be on par with **Vancouver's** Stanley Park.

Carr said that there are plenty of low-budget options that could start tomorrow. The city has already spent a paltry \$2,000 on café tables and chairs, which added instant animation to the civic plaza this summer. Carr said that bringing a café cart down to the library square from the 12th floor city hall cafeteria would be another great addition. He has also heard suggestions to hold night classes in city hall, install arty birdhouses around the square, and host weekend festivals in the plaza. Another solution would eventually see Square One turned inside out, and retail brought onto the city's sidewalks.

Community services planning advisor **Gil Penalosa** supports that idea. With 37 per cent of the city's population born outside of Canada, Penalosa says that there are plenty of opportunities to showcase food, culture and music of the city's diverse population.

"We have to take advantage of the ethnic mix," he said. "This is an opportunity, not a problem." Penalosa adds that partnerships should also be forged with local theatre groups, or even the nearby University of Toronto-Mississauga campus. "We are not talking about a lot of money, but we will need a lot of partners to make this a success," he said.

According to Penalosa, over the next few weeks, the city will consider an implementation mechanism to

make the plan a reality. Public Spaces is to present a draft plan in November, with a final plan to be presented to council in February 2006. •

"This is an opportunity, not a problem."

- Gil Penalosa



CITY OF BRAMPTON REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

FOR PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION SPACE FOR CITY HALL STAFF

SEALED PROPOSALS, marked as to contents, in the envelope provided will be received by the Purchasing Agent **NOT LATER THAN 2:00:00 p.m. Local Time**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2005, for the above mentioned.

The City is seeking Expressions of Interest from qualified Proponents to provide development proposals to supplement or expand the current City Hall administrative space.

The City expects the Project would consist of an office building or alternatively an office space component included within a larger mixed-use development. Retail space is required at street level. The proposed development must meet the City's space, functional, urban design and economic objectives described in this document.

Complete Documents are available from Purchasing & Materials Management Division, 2nd Floor, 2 Wellington St. W., Brampton, On L6Y 4R2.

A. Livingston, CPPO
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